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ABSTRACT

The humanistic value of expressive discourse should form the basis for reinstating composition in the curricula of higher education. Educators must realize that the process of thinking that goes on before an assertion or statement of purpose is written is related to the familiar prewriting concept; that approaches to invention are as various as composers; that, although artificial models do serve composers, honest introspection is generative in itself; that the "languaging" of invention offers a vehicle for discovery; and that humanity forms the centrality of expressive discourse. (Author/KS)

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HUMANISTIC INVENTION IN EXPRESSIVE DISCOURSE

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In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, among various basic definitions of "invention," we find the following description: "The devising of a subject, idea, or method of treatment, by exercise of the intellect or imagination." Likewise, in the same source, we find that invention is not only "the action, faculty, or manner of inventing" but also "the thing invented." In these remarks I wish to consider various approaches the writer may use in inventing a subject for expressive discourse through the use of such human capacities as intellect, imagination, sense experience. Certain obvious limitations to this purpose will appear through my selection of specific problems for consideration.

During the past twenty years we have experienced a revival of interest in the concept of invention. Professor Gary Tate recently summarized the contemporary problem of theoretical considerations of invention:

> We have rediscovered the classical topics, and we have developed pre-writing procedures ranging from meditation to journal keeping. We now have Richard Young's 'nine-cell search procedure,' and we have available a fairly substantial number of journal articles on the topic of invention. What bothers me about all this work is its artificiality.[1]

Tate's own illustration of one inventive process grew out of "the assertion-support unit" in which each student was encouraged to find in his past experience his reasons for making whatever assertion he made. Apart from the fact that Tate was using an assertion "model," an artificiality of sorts, he does not consider the problem of discovery or inventing the assertion, the *a priori* reason(s) or process for asserting in the first place. Of course, if we accept the conditions of the freshman classroom, an assignment, and a written "exercise," then the assertion model may be considered a proper unit at some stage in the discipline of inventing. Yet, somehow, we have skipped I believe a number of stages in or characteristics of the process, not only our arrival at the assertion proper but the psychological and rhetorical considerations which led to the assertion. However, Tate has given focus to the central problem: artificial processes as contrasted with those which emerge from the integrity of each human being expressing his human experience.

In our attempts to teach effective expression efficiently to large numbers of students we have uncritically accepted basic ideational models as substitutes for the personal process of invention, models through which each writer will express his thoughts and feelings, attitudes and experiences, criticisms and judgments. Perhaps we have put the cart before the horse, for such uncritical acceptance has generated a rhetorical formalism in our texts and teaching — it is difficult to distinguish one freshman composition text from another and one freshman classroom from another, and, significantly, such an approach has alienated the minds of student writers, who have become expert at role-playing, at performing "exercises" for the teacher, at attempting to figure out the rhetorical value-scale of each teacher of composition. In fact, to digress, in many instances the student studies assiduously the teacher's preferences, such as the list of errors to overcome, formal organization, thesis and topic sentences, and he attempts systematically to satisfy the teacher's "demands." In theory at least, such a composition should satisfy the teacher, although it may neither satisfy nor interest the student; but, as we all know, such is not the case, for each of us has a new list to spring on the student on the next go-round.

Inventing, discovering, is not the same in expressive discourse as that in critical-analytical-argumentative-persuasive discourse; it is primarily self- not audience-directed. Invention in expressive discourse originates in the mind, imagination, and experience of the writer, the humanistic concerns, growing out of his perception and understanding of the meanings of his experience. It grows out of his knowledge of himself, what he thinks and feels, what attitudes he holds, what values he gives priority to, what his experiences have been and what they mean to him, both consciously and unconsciously.

Out of his translation of his human experience into knowledge and understanding the seeds of invention emerge, from a hint, a phrase, a perception, a question, a memory, a fancy, a hope. Such seeds as these bring into play the epistemological questions of how an individual "knows" anything about those things he finds in himself. The criss-crossing, countering, modifying, embellishing, pausing, taking stock, retreating, repeating, beginning anew that we usually describe as discovering and thinking are at the base of invention. The process is both a wordless and a verbal searching, a joyful and joyless process of selection and rejection, of purposefulness and purposelessness, an aim with no target, a target with no bow, an arrow with no aim behind it — I do not intend the metaphor to substitute for thought but only to give an elementary suggestion of the complexity of the nature of invention when examined as self-expression.

A member of the English Department at VPI&SU told the story of asking the cook at his home one morning how she felt; her reply was, "Mr. Tench, I ain't arranged my attitudes yet." Her reply represents one of the stages of invention in self-expression, a perception of the self in the midst of invention. The cook had not established aim, target, bow, or arrow; she was in the process of selecting from among the arrows of her experience.

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II

When we go to the testimonies of creative writers for autobiographical descriptions of their experiences in inventing, "creating," we are immediately struck by the variety of approaches they use, the human resources they draw upon to "discover" purpose, value, means of expression, generative discipline, even working habits. From an examination of these testimonies two matters of special consequence to expressive discourse emerge: 1) each writer or artist must pass through a series of subjective experiences before he discovers purpose, and 2) the route or discipline or stages through which each writer invents differs from the route or discipline or stages another follows.

Brewster Ghiselin has described seven basic characteristics or stages through which the creator or inventor passes: 1) an "impulse toward order," 2) "a sense of value in the end sought", 3) "management, including discovering the clue that suggests the development to be sought, that intimates the creative (inventive) end to be reached, and assuring a certain and economical movement toward that end", 4) gestation, or what Henry James has called "the deep well of unconscious cerebration", 5) an "organic need . . . rather than will, that must determine the choice of subject", 6) preliminary labor, a time of "mastering accumulated knowledge, gathering new facts, observing, exploring, experimenting, developing technique and skill, sensibility, and discrimination . . . ", 7) and the "work of verification, correction, or revision . . . "[2]

If I might oversimplify Ghiselin's descriptions, the inventor of expressive discourse must deal with the human sources of invention, such as the memory, images, feelings, ideas, etc., with the human means of invention, the translation of the non-verbal to the verbal, and with the human ends of invention, from the clue stage through the final stage of the thing invented, the discourse unit.

We find it quite easy to fall into the psychological and rhetorical trap of believing that invention must have a core process, when, in fact, we know that invention may emerge from a focus on any aspect of human experience. The germinative process of creative writers indicates the variousness of inventive sources. So too those we describe as original thinkers describe their creative processes autobiographically in terms of the great variety and depth of sources of invention. The stimulus of something within — a memory, a word, a sense experience, an action, an attitude, a feeling — as well as without — a passing bus, a chance conversation, an accident, a cold day, a symbol — lead to invention, triggering a series of related, and oftentimes unrelated, thoughts, attitudes, tones, values, like the disconnectedness of a dream sequence or the details of a nightmare. That there is no primary or single process of invention is not a matter of great concern, for each composer must discover in his own experiences those processes which enable him to draw from himself his personal insights, his understandings, his feelings, his attitudes, his thoughts, and, finally, those things he would express.

The complexity of the nature of the inventive process as well as the variety of sources of invention are reflected in the following brief adaptation of the creative process to the objectives of invention. It is markedly clear that the composer must do his subjective homework in detail before he writes an assertion or purpose statement for a unit of expressive discourse.

an "impulse toward order"

This tentativeness, something we might call a process of introspective consciousness-unconsciousness, is clearly related to the psychology of motive, in particular the quality of motive. For example, the ethical nature of motive, the intellectual objectives of motive, the psycho-social effects of motive are all matters of concern. Perhaps the study of the theory invention in self-expression should commence with the deeper study, self-study, of motive and subsequently of will or volition. Motivational research has been committed to the *effect* of prose discourse; at the other end of the spectrum are the composer's motives for inventing, the approach of the humanistic disciplines to the theory of invention in terms of individual integrity, honesty, moral goodness, and such. In this instance a humanistic theory of invention would be directed toward the study of the composer, not the resulting discourse unit or the audience to whom the unit is directed.

Of special interest in the study of invention are the meanings of personality in the process. Most descriptions of style, both linguistic and stylistic, for example, follow formal criteria, which are usually external or language manifestations of the person behind the expression, a sorting out of the individually unique, characteristic, repetitious, habitual features of a writer's language. In many textbooks we find the suggestion that the writer humanize his expression, as if the humanization of a unit of discourse is something added. The nature of the inventive process conveys the personality of the composer. There are dull processes of invention and dull discourse units produced; there are superficial processes, inspired processes, generalized processes, and such. Coleridge would describe invention in terms of a Hartleyan psychology: the fanciful process of invention generates fanciful discourse, such as Cowley's works; the imaginative inventive process generates imaginative units of discourse, such as Wordsworth's.[3]

"a sense of value in the end sought"

In the initial stages the inventive process is one of selection and rejection, of tentative purposefulness becoming an initial skimming-scanning of the self and personal experience followed by a more controlled and directed focussing of the searching process. In using an organic metaphor one must say that the composer is sorting among the seeds of the self, among ideas, attitudes, experiences, selecting something to suit his expressive purpose, his discourse aims, and his statement of purpose. Throughout the process he holds a tentative point of view, making assumptions, challenging premises, selecting related details, rejecting and entertaining the relatedness of details, offering and accepting compromises of meaning, phrasing and rephrasing what he wishes to say as distinguished from what the words and sentences and paragraphs say, infer, or imply.

"discovering the clue that suggests the development to be sought"

The traditional invocation of the poet was conventional on the one hand, yes, but it was also a search for the stimulation of invention. Likewise the oral formula of the epic bard was a disciplined vehicle for invention. Each writer must examine himself and challenge himself to find what works. But the generation of invention is not enough, although the command or disciplined understanding of what inventive processes work is a first step, is self-revelatory, rewarding, practically a way of establishing a working process of meditation, introspection, reflection, recollection, fusing, translating.

"the deep well of unconscious cerebration"

Once a clue or clues to the meanings of human experience have been found, the source of invention moves from the vague and indefinite to the interaction of the conscious and unconscious, including the preconscious, where not only is the language, the verbal, a primary focus, but where also the verbal processes of the will, imagination, memory — the conscious self — are dealing with perceptions and apperceptions, to use Leibniz' term, while the unconscious works with the clue or clues in its own inexplicable way.

The fascination of the interplay between the consciousness and the unconsciousness is present in almost every description of the creative process given by any creative writer in western civilization from Plato to the present. Perhaps the best description of this interplay comes from Carl Jung, who distinguishes between the psychological mode of artistic creation which "deals with materials drawn from the realm of human consciousness" and the visionary mode of artistic creation which draws from experience which "is a strange something that derives its existence from the hinterland of man's mind — that suggests the abyss of time separating us from pre-human ages, or evokes a super-human world of contrasting light and dark." Of these two modes Jung writes: "In dealing with the psychological mode of artistic creation, we never need ask ourselves what the material consists of or what it means. But this question forces itself upon us as soon as we come to take the visionary mode of creation."[4]

Another view of invention will result from an examination of the quality of the character of invention, when the composer has selected a focus or a tentative direction for his unit of expression. The quality of the focus reflects degrees of the traditional dichotomous concerns with intellectual truthfulness and falseness, role-playing, "counterfeiting," as President Truman would describe the process, moral goodness and badness, aesthetic beauty and ugliness, pragmatic usefulness and uselessness. At the focus of invention the composer tentatively stops at a series of uncritical or unanalyzed assumptions, on the one hand, or at a nexus resulting from an examination of a series of carefully considered compromises; in either instance the quality of the germinal nexus is an intimate reflection of the self-hood of the composer.

For example, such considerations as those suggested here are directly related to the intellectual maturity or innocence of the composer. Likewise the ethical strength of the writer, as distinguished from faith and behavior, is manifest. The ulterior, both conscious and subconscious, to illustrate, is something the composer confronts in the invention stage, if he holds integrity high among his personal values.

"an organic need . . . that must determine the choice of subject"

Invention is governed by certain principles, usually unstated. For example, the composer is governed not by what he *knows* to say but by what he *finds and chooses* to say. The intimate freshman autobiography, to illustrate, sometimes embarrasses the reader because the freshman writer occasionally elects to be "truthful," to say what he knows about his personal experience rather than choosing what appropriately can be said. The matter of taste in one's relationships with others and sensitivity to self function in the composer's mind during the invention stage.

Another set of concerns in the study of invention appears when the persona or role-player concept is considered. To illustrate one facet of the problem, the character of the composer is, to some degree, manifest only in the subjects he considers and the purpose he selects but also in his expression of self, his choice to disguise or reveal himself, as he sees himself, his basic character. Aristotle has described the value and significance of character in its persuasive effects, Walker Gibson has proposed a choice of a rhetorical persona, Harry Truman, more Aristotelian than Gibsonian, has stated the problem succinctly when he rejects the "counterfeit" person.[3]

A theory or theories of invention must begin with individual self-study, not with study of the language system nor mechanistic and artificial generative systems, not through an *in vacuo* approach, not in anticipated audience effects. It must begin with the study of individual integrity.

"preliminary labor"

The nexus of invention is governed in great part by the intensity of the composer's understanding and his ability to make choices. For the more "opinionated" writer the choice of a subject for self-expression is a relatively easy thing, requiring a short time-span; his choice is followed by radar-like searching of the self for related ideas, attitudes, recollections, things read, experiences, followed by a statement of purpose. On the other hand, the time may be greatly extended, even long-lasting, for the more tentative decision-maker, for he searches the consciousness, generating and stimulating the unconscious as well as the memory in the process of selecting a subject; in turn he repeats the process as he seeks to clarify and select a specific purpose.

The writer of a letter of sympathy or condolence, for example, given the situation and the degree of intimacy in the relationship of the writer to his correspondent, will find himself inventing contents, phrasings, tones that will convey exactly the nature and quality of the grief and sympathy he wishes to convey. And he will measure the quality of the letter, in this instance, through his anticipation of the human response of the receiver. The invention is a complex human relationship addressed through the language of the unit of discourse. Of course the writer may have selected a "sympathy card" from the shelf of the local card store, testimony to the mass way to address human grief and loss, without experiencing any of the more meaningful experiences of invention, although he may observe that he has searched for a card which he considers "appropriate."

The freshman English classroom poses a special problem insofar as invention is an element in the composing process, for the immediacy and necessity of human personal relationships are, in great part, absent; the situation the writer faces is indefinite ("write a theme on"); the writer, and frequently the teacher, view the composing process and the compositions as "exercises" rather than as human expressions; and the audience is usually indistinct ("write for your classmates"). Moreover, the student has learned to role-play in class: find out what the teacher wants and give *it* to him.

"the work of verification, correction, or revision"

The preliminary labor of getting together a unit of expressive discourse does not guarantee a finished composition; in fact, in most instances the rewriting stage is very much a part of invention, for during this stage the critical and analytical nature of the composer comes to the fore, challenging the very humanity of the composition, from the precision and appropriateness of ideas and attitudes to those of dictional and figurative choices. Moreover, usually at this stage intellectual reservations in a thousand disguises appear, each with its accompanying valid reasons for rejecting, modifying, rewriting, embellishing each sentence of the discourse unit. Even the tangential ideas and values and expressions and phrasings challenge the validity, the "rightness," of what the composer has written. In like manner the composition suddenly appears open-ended rather than a unit of anything. The composer's inventiveness is challenged by the inventiveness of language itself, and he finds himself asking, who is in control here?

III

What, practically, may the composer do to invent? At the beginning of these observations I suggested that the traditional distinctions of the *OED*, that invention is a process and a thing invented, is a matter of focus. If the composer wishes to practice invention, to discipline himself in invention, he must discover what process or processes work for him. The descriptions of the prewriting process in most textbooks emphasize ideas and propose subjects which might generate the process. But such a process may, for many writers, lead nowhere, give limited results, even be quite unsuccessful, such a determination is a matter for each composer to discover for himself. Still, failure resulting from the commonplace ideational process, for example, should not keep the composer from experimenting to find what processes work best for him, what processes give results. It may be that a series of feelings will generate the process — if so, the writer should cultivate series of feelings; it may be that specific feelings associated with a symbol will be successful; it may be that working from an outward physical object to an inward response will spark the inventive process; it may be that a gestalt, a puzzle, a word or phrase, a passing laugh, an unpleasant smell will start the process, some combination or mixture of the verbal and nonverbal, of memory and the immediate, of the ideational and the physical. The absurd, seasickness in a bathtub, an historical incident, a fictional account found in reality, a ritual, any of these may function efficiently as well.

If, practically speaking, the process must yield a unit of discourse, the composer must do more than spark the process and experience the excitement of discovery. In many ways the process is a kind of monologue, a verbal-nonverbal interior monologue of sorts. The discourse unit, the thing invented, is developed for a listener or reader. In fact, the anticipation of an audience may be a stimulus for the inventive process. There are things within the individual which he would express, to persuade others, to move them, to challenge, to refute, to share, all of the human purposes of human discourse, comfort, loyalty, aspiration, ambition, love, contempt, joy.

What can the composer do to arrive at an assertion or purpose statement or guiding statement? The inventive process has as its object utilitarian expression; the creative process has as its object aesthetic expression. Brewster Ghiselin describes the latter as follows: it "is the process of change, of development, of evolution in the organization of subjective life."[4] For the inventive composer, his

psychic expression must begin in vagueness, in an attempt to discover his expression below and beyond the habitual expressions of everyday life in what Ghiselin has called "a working sea of indecision," a preverbal intimation.

The inventive process is a process of meditation, introspection, reflection, recollection, fusing, translating, a verbal-nonverbal interior monologue working toward consciousness and expression. The composer must stimulate this process consciously initially, allow it time to take conscious reflections into the process, examine the germinations emerging, and repeat the process, in each instance attempting to "language" the germinations, the generations, the discoveries. Perhaps the translation from the nonverbal intimation to the language level is the most difficult stage in the process, for the attitudes-feelings-memories-insights-tones-motives-ideas-senses are *there*, in the person, in the unconsciousness, available in part to call by the consciousness and in part available to the consciousness-unconsciousness stimulation of the motivational, of the occasion or reason(s) for beginning the inventive activity.

To illustrate, Max Ernst has defined the "mechanism of collage" as "the exploitation of the chance meeting on a non-suitable plane of two mutually distant realities."[1] His illustration of the process is informative:

> A complete, real thing, with a simple function apparently fixed once and for all (an umbrella), coming suddenly into the presence of another real thing, very different and no less incongruous (a sewing machine) in surroundings where both must feel out of place (on a dissecting table), escapes by this very fact from its simple function and its own identity, through a new relationship its false absolute will be transformed into a different absolute, at once true and poetic: the umbrella and the sewing machine will make love. The mechanism of the process seems to me to be laid bare by this very simple example. Complete transmutation followed by a pure act such as the act of love must necessarily occur every time the given facts make conditions favourable for the pairing of two realities which apparently can not be paired on a plane apparently not suited to them.[2]

Ernst's theory of juxtaposition and activity is predicated on a series of choices or stages in the collage process, which may be adapted by the composer as an inventive process. The stages include selecting two entities (umbrella and sewing machine from the sensory world, sadness and a sycamore tree from the realm of feeling and physical reality, memory of an incident such as the time one was caught cheating in school with an idea from the Ten Commandments or Nichomachean Ethics, etc.), placing these two entities in nonnormal or unusual contexts or surroundings (such as placing the feeling of sadness and the sycamore tree at a wedding), and creating or inventing an activity in which the two entities may engage in the new surroundings, such as the sadness and the sycamore at the wedding contemplating the tragic nature of man, the man is born to sorrow refrain. The nucleus of invention is present in the collage process, however artificial the initiation of the process may appear at first. Moreover, the simple example given provides the nucleus for the development of complex experience and thought.

In like manner the composer may use apperception, in the Leibnitzian sense of the term, as an approach to the inventive process, for the *thereness* of what is in the person's consciousness and emerging unconsciousness may be apperceived without any conscious effort being made to generate ideas, thought, reasoning, images, recollections, etc. Apperception must be distinguished from free association, for the focus in free association is on the entities associated and the sequence, whereas in apperception the composer is making no conscious effort to stimulate either the consciousness or the unconsciousness, but isolates a "perceiver" from his self-hood which perceives what that self-hood generates. In metaphysics apperception has been described as the mind's being "conscious of its consciousness."[3]

In these remarks I have suggested that the commonplace ideational approach to invention is stultifying to our students, that the hard work of thinking and inventing and discovering that goes on before an assertion or purpose statement is written is both prior to and includes the familiar prewriting concept, that routes or sequences or approaches to invention are as various as composers, that artificial models do serve composers but that honest introspection is generative in itself, that the "languaging" of invention offers a vehicle for discovery, that the humanity of man provides the centrality of expressive discourse. If we would reinstate composition in the curricula of higher education and in the life of our students, we might well begin with the humanistic value of expressive discourse.

NOTES

[1] "Searching for a Romantic Rhetoric," *A Symposium in Rhetoric*, edited by Dean Bishop and others (Denton, Texas: Texas Woman's University Print Shop, 1975), p. 8.

[2] *The Creative Process* (New York: The New American Library, 1955), pp. 11-31.

[3] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Philosophical Lectures of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by Kathleen Coburn (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1949), p. 369.

[4] Carl Gustav Jung, "Psychology and Literature," translated by W. S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes, in *The Creative Process*, pp. 211-212.

[5] Aristotle, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, translated by Lane Cooper (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1932), p. 8: "Of the means of persuasion supplied by the speech itself there are three kinds. The first kind reside in the character [*ethos*] of the speaker . . ."

[6] Walker Gibson, *Persona* (New York: Random House, 1969), p. xi. This book "centers its attention on the author's created *persona*, his mask or voice, in passages of prose. It takes the view that our decisions about the language we use are, in part, calculated to present our reader or listener with a recognizable character who is to do the communicating." Merle Miller, *Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry Truman* (New York: Berkley Publishing Corporation, 1974), pp. 66-67.

[7] Ghiselin, p. 12.

[8] Ghiselin, p. 66.

[9] From *Webster's New World Dictionary*.